

IN THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (currently amended):

1. An optical fiber preform assembly, comprising:
a preform core rod;
at least one overclad tube formed around the preform core rod to form an overclad optical fiber preform, the overclad tube having a first end;
a handle attached to the first end of the overclad tube; and
a refractory material positioned between the preform core rod and the handle, wherein the refractory material is positioned to reduce movement of the preform core rod into the handle, and wherein the refractory material has a melting temperature sufficiently greater than that of the preform core rod and the overclad tube to prevent flow of the refractory material into the handle when the optical fiber preform assembly is heated.

Claim 2 (canceled)

Claim 3 (original):

3. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the refractory material is made of at least one of the materials selected from the group consisting of magnesium oxide (MgO), aluminum oxide (Al₂O₃), spinel (MgO-Al₂O₃), mullite (Al₂O₃-SiO₂), yttrium oxide (Y₂O₃), zirconium oxide (ZrO₂), calcium oxide (CaO), silicon nitride (Si₃N₄), silicon carbide (SiC), titanium carbide (TiC) and boron nitride (BN).

Claim 4 (original):

4. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the refractory material has a melting temperature greater than approximately 2000 degrees Celsius.

Claim 5 (original):

5. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the refractory material further comprises a refractory material disc positioned between the preform core rod and the handle.

Claim 6 (original):

6. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the refractory material further comprises a refractory material tube positioned between the preform core rod and the handle.

Claim 7 (original):

7. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the refractory material is isolated from the preform core rod.

Claim 8 (original):

8. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the assembly further comprises a silica disc positioned between the preform core rod and the refractory material, wherein the silica disc isolates the preform core rod from the refractory material.

Claim 9 (original):

9. The assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the handle is made of silica.

Claim 10 (canceled)

Claim 11 (canceled)

Claim 12 (canceled)

Claim 13 (canceled)

Claim 14 (canceled)

Claim 15 (canceled)

Claim 16 (canceled)

Claim 17 (canceled)

Claim 18 (canceled)